

## **ELIMINATION BY SUBSTITUTION: CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND INDIGENOUS FAITH INTERPLAY IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the unique method of ‘elimination of substitution’ often use by the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) in its bid to eradicate indigenous worship among the Yoruba people in Nigeria. It is particularly concerned to show how the Christ Apostolic Church, an independent Pentecostal church, has transformed Nigerian Christianity from a cold and Eurocentric to a dynamic and power demonstrating one. In spite of the various challenges that the church is facing, the CAC reveals the deep spirituality and great concern for practical and existential issues through its holistic presentation of Jesus as savior, healer, and deliverer. The paper concludes that, the CAC is a blessing for Nigeria in the sense that it brings many souls to Christ through its services to God and humanity.

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**Keywords:** Elimination, Substitution, Christ Apostolic Church, Traditional faith

### **Introduction**

Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), a Pentecostal Christian denomination that grew out of prayer movement in the early 20th century through Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola, is spreading like wild fire over the whole of Nigeria and beyond. Pentecostalism as used to describe the C.A.C. in this paper signifies a movement in ecclesiastical history which aims at a rediscovery of the spiritual fervor, especially the manifestation of *charismata* (spiritual gifts) of the first century Apostolic Church (Fatokun, 2007:2). It expresses itself in the form of evangelism that is characterized by the belief in the post conversion experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit manifesting in the speaking in tongues. In its aggressive evangelism, some indigenous adherents who were typical traditional worshippers have been converted to Christianity in recent time.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the C.A.C. on the society that already had its indigenous religion presupposes an invasion on the part of the traditional religion. Again, because of the secular nature of the Nigerian society, it has been observed that the indigenous faith among the Yoruba Christians has come to stay and that there was nothing anyone could do about it. As a result of this, they do not see anything wrong in attending a Christian service on Sunday and on subsequent days of the week engaging in the traditional religion. Thus, in a bid for the church to displace indigenous religion among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, many factors came into play. It is therefore the attempt to examine the unique method through which the indigenous faith is being eliminated and substituted it with the new life in Christ that prompted research into this topic.

### **Yoruba before the arrival of Christianity**

The Yoruba people, who constitute one of the major ethnic groups in modern Nigeria, are mostly found in the southwestern Nigeria. They cover the whole of Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Lagos and substantial part of Kwara and Kogi States (Owoeye, 2003:36). A fair percentage of the Yoruba populace inhabits the southeastern part of the Republic of Benin and Togo. Furthermore, the Yoruba people can be found spotted round the whole universe. For instance, there is a group of Yoruba known as ‘*Aku*’ in Sierra Leone, another group is found in Cuba by the name *Lukumi* (Falokun, 1992:194), while some can still be found in distant Brazil. This group is known as *Nago*. All these areas referred to, formed what was known as the Yoruba nation before the European partition of Africa (Olatunde, 1992:4).

Religiously, the Yoruba communities are known as the stronghold of divinities, they are, therefore, very religious. They practice the indigenous religion of their ancestors. The religion is the systematic interpretation of the indigenous life and religious experience of the Yoruba people as deposited in their oral tradition, myths, legends and world around them. The religion of Yoruba permeates their lives so much that it expresses itself in multi-various ways. For instance, their social, political, commercial, and economic activities are visible expressions of religion. In the observation of Idowu, he says, ‘religion is the keynote of their life; in everything they are very religious’ (Idowu, 1982:5).

In addition to the general acceptance of the reality of God as the Supreme Being, the Yoruba belief in the existence of several divinities that were regarded as God’s ministers created to take charge of different sectors of the Universe. While all the Yoruba groups believe in and worship such divinities, each community has a favorite one which is worshipped by the majority of the people without prejudice to the worship of other divinities. Prominent among the divinities in Yoruba land are: Orunmila, Obatala, Ogun, Esu, Sango,

Oya, Osun and the host of others (Adewale, 1988:1). This is the religious situation of the Yoruba land before the arrival of Christianity.

### **Christianity in Yoruba land**

Christianity was preached first in Nigeria in the 15th century by the Portuguese Roman Catholics (Alana, 1993:200). Its advent into Yoruba land was part of the second coming of the religion Leone and settled in Badagry, Abeokuta, and Lagos for missionaries (Aderibigbe, 2001:147). It was from these cradles of badagry and Abeokuta that Christianity spread to into Nigeria. The first attempt, which was largely restricted to coastal areas of Calabar, Warri, and Benin were a failure (Aderibigbe, 2001:147). This successful coming of Christianity was consequent upon the demand of the Yoruba group who had left Sierra all parts of Yoruba land. As noted earlier, an attempt to introduce a new religion in the traditional society meant an invasion or loss of ground on the part of the traditional religion. Thus, there are numerous oppositions and anti-missionary movements in various parts of the Yoruba land. For instance, in Ile-Ife, which is believed to be the ancestral and the spiritual home of the Yoruba, people revolted against Christianity and took a vow never to accept foreign religion. It is the spot on which the resolution was registered that is called *Oke-Ileri* (Idowu, 1982:207) (hill of vow) up till today.

Nevertheless, as a result of the fact that propagation of one's faith is a religious demand that cannot be easily suppressed (Ogunleye, 2003:21). Christianity resurfaces in Ile-Ife and other Yoruba communities. By the period of colonialism in Nigeria, the Christianity brought by the Orthodox churches had to some extent been firmly rooted among the Yoruba. However, the brand of Christianity so introduced was highly Eurocentric. Its characteristic cold formalism and stereotyped form of worship made it unsatisfactory to African heritage of religious emotionalism (Falokun, 1992:10). This unsatisfactory nature of orthodox churches prompted the emergence of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria amongst which the Christ Apostolic Church is one.

### **Christ Apostolic Church in (Yoruba) Nigeria**

The Christ Apostolic Church, an indigenious and an independent Pentecostal church, came into existence as a result of the fusion of two movements namely; The Precious Stone and the Faith Tabernacle which had existed independently between 1918 and 1940 (Omidiwura, 1999:123). Leaders of these movements were Joseph Sadare, D.O. Odubanjo, I.B. Akinyele (Late Olubadan of Ibadan), Miss Sophia Odunlami and (Late Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola who was later called into the ministry by the Lord in 1928 and was baptized by these leaders. A few years later, tension rose between the group and the Anglican

Church over the practices such as: divine healings, opposition to infant baptism, reliance on dreams and visions, abstinence from dancing, drumming, drinking of alcohol, gambling and mixing with non Christians. The sequel to this disagreement, Mr. Joseph Sadare was compelled to give up his post in the synod and others were forced to resign their jobs and to withdraw their children from the Anglican school (CAC Constitution, 1998).

The great revival of 1930 with Apostle J.A. Babalola at Oke Ooye Ilesa in Osun State boosted the morale of the movement and people were attracted to the fold. Having borne several names such as: African Apostolic Church, Apostolic Church, and United Apostolic Church, the movement was eventually named Christ Apostolic Church by Apostle J.A. Babalola, and was so registered in May, 1943 under the *Lands Perpetual Succession Ordinance* of 1924 with registration number 147 (Arijesudade, 2000:9). The emergence of the youth associations such as the “Light of the World Society” and the “Christ Apostolic Church Students Association” acted as catalysts in establishing assemblies and fellowship centers in most of the Yoruba and non-Yoruba speaking parts of Nigeria and since then, the church has been doing exploits for Christ through its various branches and ministries throughout Yoruba land.

#### **Exploits for Christ: Elimination by Substitution**

By its nature, structure, belief and practices, the Christ Apostolic Church are distinctly an independent Pentecostal church. True to this, it has been doing exploits for Christ and at the same time rendering services to humanity in the various sectors of life. Prominent among the numerous exploits that the church has been doing for Christ in Yoruba land is ‘soul winning’. In its aggressive evangelism through soul-searching sermons (both in the church and on air) and spirit-filled revivals, many lost souls have been recovered for Christ.

During some of these revivals, many people, including kings who are the custodians of the indigenous faith have renounced their old faiths, gods and goddesses and substituted them with the new life in Christ (Sunday Tribune, 2001:1). These are regular occurrences during various revivals organized by the C.A.C. nationwide in general and in Yoruba land in particular. Through this, some oppressive demonic forces that have been receiving sacrifices from people were eliminated and places believed to be *Igbo awos* (demonic forests), which ordinary human beings could not enter before have been converted to churches, camps and prayer grounds. It is interesting to note here that, Yoruba land, which is formally known as the stronghold of divinities, is now the international headquarters of the C.A.C.

Secondly is the ‘divine healing’. This is one of the cardinal articles of faith of the C.A.C. and it is believed to be through obedience to the commandment of Christ, faith in his name

and merit of his blood for sickness, disease and infirmities. All communities and nations of the world have had tastes of different diseases and occasional outbreaks of epidemics. For instance, the influenza outbreak that spread to Yoruba land in 1930 which killed many people was suppressed by Apostle Babalola during his Oke-Ooye revival at Ilesa. (Google search, 2010). Since then all the services, revivals and other activities of the church are being accompanied by divine healing of various types of diseases that had defied both the orthodox and traditional medicament in the contemporary society. Despite the achievement of science in the field of medicine in terms of psychotherapy, physiotherapy and psychiatry, it had not provided a solution to the problems of demonic and mysterious illness especially those that are connected with sin and guilt. It is believed that demons and their accompanied afflictions can only be dislodged through divine intervention. No wonder, the prayer house (CAC) has been turned into health centers.

Moreover, education is another means through which the CAC exploits for Christ. The church holds the belief that a major service which must be rendered in order to effect the liberation and salvation of mankind is through education. The C.A.C. is also of the view that such a service should be offered while its beneficiaries are still in their infancy. Today, there are many C.A.C primary and secondary schools in every nook and cranny of the country. Through this, pupils can read the word of God and learn more about Him. Not only this, the history of the church has witnessed remarkable development in the establishment of a Training Bible College in Ede, Pastoral Training College, Ibadan, School of Prophets and Evangelists, Ilesa, Faith Home in Ede and Theological Seminary at Ile-Ife. All these institutions helped the church to firmly establish religious practices and liturgy peculiar to it (CAC Constitution, 1980). With the sound knowledge of the word of God through education, the stronghold of Satan was pulled down and substituted with salvation for the people under demonic bondage.

Furthermore, the church has been acting as the conscience of the nation whenever the nation seems to have lost its conscience. The church always rises to the occasion by constantly proclaiming the truth and warning the nation against disregarding God's law meant for the good of the community (Omidiwura, 2000:73). In the religious experience of Nigeria, the C.A.C. has been empowering people to repudiate, detest, and be receptive in solidarity to issues of both spiritual and social interest. The church has not allowed its 'Light' to be overpowered by the presence of darkness around it. The lone voices such as that of Prophet T.O. Obadare and others are being heard preaching against all forms of injustice in the country

Politically, the church is contributing its own quota to the political stability of the country. Just like the prophets of old, the church is confronting every evil and anomaly with the truth of God, correcting and guiding the society towards a godly state (Akinyode, 1993:80). Apart from this, regular prayers always offer for the nation, state and even communities for the peace to reign and also divine guidance for leaders.

Last but not the least, the church is also contributing in no small measure to the extermination of negative cultures, taboos, use of juju, and other demonic weapons against one another and substituted them with the spirit of love. These and many others are some of the ways through which the C.A.C. is doing exploits for Christ, contributing tremendously to its immediate environment and to the Christendom at large.

### **Challenges of the Church**

The church (CAC) is facing a series of challenges in recent years. First and foremost is in the area of education. The schools (both primary and secondary) that were formally owned by the church which are now in the hand of government are presently in a “sorry state.” Their classrooms are dilapidated, staff is inadequate, and even fewer staff are not well paid as at when due. The reasons for government’s taking over of these schools cannot be justified in this present dispensation. In spite of the agitation from various quarters that the mission schools should be returned to their original owners just like that of Edo State, where some mission schools had been returned to their owners (Ehianu, 2006:86), the government is yet to do something as regards to that.

The second challenge is the non-active participation of the C.A.C. members in the political matters. To do away with selfish complacency, Christians must be involved. The church should not fold its hands but be actively involved in decision making. It had been rightly observed that “the prize honest men pay for keeping silent and not getting involved is to be ruled by dishonest men.” (CAN Publicity committee, 1989:v) When unbelievers are ruling, people groan and suffer under the heavy servitude and evil policies for which we are now fasting and praying to God to remove. If others play politics in a dirty way, the church has the right to challenge and inject righteousness into it by not being apathetic but by being involved (Akinyode, 1993:80). The church cannot afford to be apathetic but join hands in seeing that the ‘dirt’ attached to politics is completely washed off.

Coming next are the challenges of evil forces, internal administration and inadequate finance. These are the early challenges of the church and they are still rearing their ugly heads in the household of God. Nevertheless, through powerful manifestation, the forces of darkness are subjected and reduced to nothing. Through this power of Pentecost, as

manifested in the CAC Agbala Itura of Abiara, the evil forces are expelled; eliminated and confounded in the name of Jesus (Ogunrinade, 2011:24). The spaces earlier occupied by evil forces are now occupied by the Holy Spirit. The major challenge now is how to maintain the status quo, addresses administrative bottleneck and generate funds for the smooth administration of the church.

Last but not the least is the challenge posed to the church by the doctrine of “Perfect Health” and “Divine Healing” which are so many over-stressed by some to the extent of refusing medical aids, dismissing it as unchristian since the bible says “by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah, 53:5). This doctrinal issue deserves our thorough deliberations.

### **Summary, Recommendation and Conclusion**

This study has examined the Pentecostal role of the C.A.C. in Nigeria as a whole and among the Yoruba in particular. The emergence of the church was welcomed with stiff opposition from various angles; the orthodox, the indigenous worshippers and even the evil forces. Nevertheless, the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, eliminated the stronghold of darkness and substituted it with the new life in Christ. As a result of this, many souls that were lost to the devil have now been recovered for Christ. Among the major roles of the CAC to humanity in Yoruba land is the spiritual role in form of evangelism, revivals and church planting through which people received their total freedom and salvation. Others include; educational role, divine healing, conscientization of people and political role towards political stability.

In spite of these roles, the church (CAC) is facing a series of challenges. These include the “sorry state” of schools that were formerly owned by the church but now in the hand of government; inadequate participation in politics by the church members; the threat of evil forces and administrative bottleneck. Sequel to the above mentioned challenges, the paper recommends that; just as it was done in Edo State, both primary and secondary schools that were formerly owned by the church should be returned to their original owner with immediate effect; that the CAC should be taking an active role in politics, that the church should remain steadfast and resolute in pulling down the stronghold of Satan and substitute it with the kingdom of God. Lastly, the church should not allow administrative bottleneck to disturb its God-given assignment.

By and large, the Christ Apostolic Church has grown from groups of persecuted and inconsequential Christians to a church denomination that today claims millions of adherents worldwide. The church possesses an impelling message of worshipping in a truly African pattern for all Nigerians. It rightly fills the gaps left by the orthodox churches. No wonder

people flock to the C.A.C. seeking solution to their social, religious, existential and psychological problems. It is on this note that the paper concludes that the C.A.C, an indigenous Pentecostal church is a blessing to Nigeria in general and Yoruba land in particular.

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